

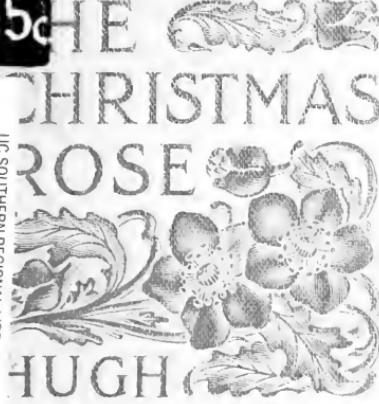
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THE CHRISTMAS ROSE



HUGH MACMILLAN

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For dear Mrs Wilkinson
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The Christmas Rose





THE CHRISTMAS ROSE

&

Other Thoughts in Verse

By

HUGH MACMILLAN

D.D., LL.D., F.R.S.E., ETC.

Author of "Bible Teachings in Nature," etc., etc.

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The Christmas Rose

UNTO the cradle of the Wondrous Child,
Heaven brought its star, and man his gold and
myrrh ;
But Nature brings each year a living gift
To halo the Divine event ; a star
Of earth, that once came from the East, and sheds
Its silver radiance round our common homes.
It comes, like Him whose birth it celebrates,
To cheer the winter of the world, and make
The very snow to blossom into life.
When earth has reached its darkest hour, this gleam
Of coming dawn appears—we seem to see
The snowdrop's mystic presence on the lawn ;
The crocus kindling where its light went out ;
The copse grow dense with purple haze of buds ;
And willows deck their wands with silken plumes.
Long mute, the birds, whene'er they see this sign,

Take heart to twitter ; and the sunbeams pale
Grow warmer as they shine upon its flowers :
And where it breathes its subtle fragrance round
The very air seems conscious of the Spring.
Last child of the old year, first of the new—
Ghost of the past, soul of the future rose—
It links the seasons with its silver clasp,
And blends our memories and hopes in one.
In this pale herald of the flowery year,
Are sketched the types of lily and of rose.
From roots of ebon darkness, through the mould,
Spring up the pure white blossoms, one by one ;
Like human hearts whose roots are dark with woe,
And yet produce the brightest flowers of heaven.
Its seeming petals—green leaves glorified—
Are moon-like made, through the December gloom,
To light dim insects to their honeyed task,
And so fulfil the higher ends of life.
At first they come up pale and blanched with cold,
But as the days grow long, a warmer hue,
Like that which deepens in the summer rose,
Or tips the daisy's frill, creeps over them ;
As if they blushed in a white flowerless world,
To find themselves the only blooming things.
Unchanged they last until the seed is ripe,
In which the single life dies for the race,
And then their purpose served they darken down

Into the dusky green of common leaves.
Transfiguration strange ! A lowly sign
Of Him whose robe and face shone whiter far
Than Hermon's crest, while of His death he talked !
That which exalts the flower above its wont,
Ennobles everything. The priestly dress
Of beauty and of glory clothes each life
That yields itself a sacrifice to love.

Preventing Mercies

THE hawthorn hedge that keeps us from intruding,
Looks very fierce and bare,
When, stripped by winter, every branch protruding
Its thorns that wound and tear.

But spring-time comes ; and, like the rod that budded,
Each twig breaks out in green ;
And cushions soft of tender leaves are studded,
Where spines alone were seen.

And honeysuckle, its bright wreath upbearing,
The prickly top adorns ;
Its golden trumpets victory declaring
Of blossoms over thorns.

Nature in this mute parable unfoldeth
A lesson sweet to me ;
God's goodness in reproof my eye beholdeth,
And His severity.

There is no grievous chastening but combineth
Some brightness with the gloom ;
Round every thorn in the flesh there twineth
Some wreath of softening bloom.

The sorrows that to us seem so perplexing,
Are mercies kindly sent,
To guard our wayward souls from sadder vexing,
And greater ills prevent.

Like angels stern, they meet us when we wander
Out of the narrow track,
With sword in hand, and yet with voices tender,
To warn us quickly back.

We fain would eat the fruit that is forbidden,
Not heeding what God saith :
But by these flaming cherubim we're chidden
Lest we should pluck our death.

To save us from the pit no screen of roses
Would serve for our defence ;
The hindrance that completely interposes,
Stings back with violence.

At first when smarting from the shock, complaining
Of wounds that freely bleed,
God's hedges of severity us paining,
May seem severe indeed.

No tender veil of heavenly verdure brightens
The branches fierce and bare ;
No sun of comfort the dark sky enlightens,
Or warms the wintry air.

But *afterwards* God's blessed spring-time cometh,
And bitter murmurs cease ;
The sharp severity that pierced us bloometh,
And yields the fruits of peace.

The wreath of life its healing leaves discovers,
Twined round each wounding stem,
And, climbing by the thorns, above them hovers
Its flowery diadem.

The last day only, all God's plan revealing,
Shall teach us what we owe
To these *preventing mercies*, thus concealing
Themselves in masks of woe ;

Shall tell what wrongs they kept us from committing,
What lust and pride they crossed,
What depths of sin they fenced, in which unwitting
Our souls would have been lost.

Then, let us sing, our guarded way thus wending,
Life's hidden snares among,
Of mercy and of judgment sweetly blending,—
Earth's sad, but lovely song.

The Avalanche

THE Alpine peasant in his lonely glen,
Who sees the sudden lake formed at its head
Burst all at once its icy barrier,
And sweep his village from its perilous ledge ;
Or hears the avalanche roar down the heights,
A cataract of snow, whose very breath
The stoutest pine-tree snaps like brittle reed,
Scattering destruction in its awful path,
And burying home and field in one white grave ;
His vision bounded by his narrow hills—
His sense impressed by his own loss alone—
Imagines that these evils are the work
Of some dread Power, that loves but to destroy.
But we who live beneath more spacious skies,
And take a wider survey of the world,
See in these evils but the needful links
In a vast scheme, by which the parched earth
Is watered and the treasures of the snow,
For ever melted and renewed, are borne,
With most beneficent economy,
Down from their storehouse on the lofty peaks,
To give prosperity and wealth to realms

That otherwise would have been barren wastes.
And so the sorrows that o'erwhelm our lot
And chill our hearts, which, in the narrow space
Of their own dark horizon, we are apt
To view with terror, as the wanton sport
Of some malicious fate that seeks our hurt ;
Viewed from a loftier vantage ground of faith,
With wider outlook of experience,
Are seen to be but transient incidents
In a great plan of loving-kindness, meant
To make our whole life richer and more blest,
And spread the fruitage of a heavenly love
O'er deserts useless both to God and man.
Beyond those hills that our horizon bound,
And hem us in and darken all our sky,
Stretch the fair lands which these white realms make
green,—

The watered gardens, whose serener heavens
Through distant storms have gained a purer blue.
Why should a living man complain, whose life
Transcends the limit of all mortal woe,
And ranges far beyond, where absolute
And everlasting compensations are !

“ Father Everest ”

The highest point of Mount Everest, locally called “ Father Everest,” the loftiest mountain in the world, when clearly seen against the blue sky, presents a most startling resemblance to an old man praying.

THE summit of the Himalayan range
Wears the resemblance of an aged man,
With head and shoulders bowed as if in prayer.
'Tis fitting that the highest point of earth
Should thus assume the lowly attitude
Of adoration, near Heaven's great white throne.
As earth's high-priest clothed in a spotless robe
Of snow unmelted since creation's dawn,
That awful peak enters within the veil
Of braided clouds, into the inmost shrine
Of Nature's sanctuary inviolate,
Bearing the crimson blood of dying suns
Upon its brow, and on its bosom bare,
A dazzling breast-plate of snow-jewels, formed
From dews and rains that feed the trees and flowers,
And all the fair luxuriance below ;
Appearing thus before High Heaven, in room
Of the great world that clings unto its skirts—

A sacrifice of white and silent death—
That heaven's rich blessings may descend to earth,
And burning plains be green with varied life.
What earth-throes vast, what ages fierce of storm,
Have perfected that mediatorial form ;
Sculptured its attitude sublime of prayer,
Against the stillness of the azure air ;
And calmed it to a patience infinite!
Youngest of peaks!¹ earth's last consummate work ;
Raised to that height supreme above the hills
That stood there with the stars when time began ;
Above the wreck of seas and shores forgot.
The oft attempted task to scale the heavens,
And reach the gods, accomplished in the end,
Not by defiance, but by humble prayer!

¹The highest mountains in the world are the most recent, having been produced by geological causes of comparatively late occurrence.

Orizaba

THERE is one spot where man may stand,
And at a single glance
All glories of the sky and land
Behold in rapture's trance.

The heavens unroll their mystic scroll
Of stars above his head ;
The Cross and Plough at either pole
Their rays together shed.

All climes of earth beneath his feet
Their varied spectrum show,
From glowing hues of tropic heat
To white of Arctic snow.

Ranged down the mountain side, his eye
All zones of life may trace,
From lichen on the summit high
To palm-tree at the base.

All seasons meet beneath the same
Triumphal arch of blue ;
And all earth's charms combine to frame
One picture to his view.

Oh ! could we find some central peak,
High in the world of soul,
From whence the broken views we seek
Might blend in one great whole ;

Where we above all doubt might soar,
In air as crystal clear,
And every mystery explore,
And bring all distance near ;

And focus in one field of light
Truth's star-beams scattered wide ;
And both the poles of things unite
Harmonious side by side !

We stand upon a point so low,
We see of earth and sky
But one small arc ; in part we know ;
In part we prophesy.

Along the horizon's narrow rim
No opening we discern ;
And mists of sense arise to dim
The wisdom that we learn.

We walk amid the world's vain show,
To higher glories blind ;
The very lights of science throw
Vague shadows on the mind.

By lines of darkness¹ we unfold
The plan of worlds afar ;
And dimly through a glass² behold
The insect and the star.

In vain we long for larger views,
Which loftier heights impart ;
The limits of our life refuse
The wishes of our heart.

Whene'er one mystery is revealed,
Into the foreground brought,
Another, by its form concealed,
Starts up to baffle thought.

While here, the wisest sage must live
By faith and not by sight ;
For duty only, Heaven will give
Enough of guiding light.

But when at last, from life's dark road,
We climb heaven's heights serene,
All light upon the hill of God
In God's light shall be seen.

All kingdoms of the truth shall there
To tearless eyes be shown ;
And, dwelling in that purer air,
We'll know even as we're known.

¹ Fraunhofer's lines in spectrum-analysis.

² Microscope and telescope.

The Superga

About five miles down the river Po, in the neighbourhood of Turin, there is an isolated hill about 1440 feet high, called the Superga. On the summit stands a magnificent dome-shaped church, built by Vittorio Amadeo II. in fulfilment of a vow when the French, in 1706, abandoned the siege of the Sardinian capital. In the subterranean vaults are the sarcophagi containing remains of princes of the house of Savoy. From the grassy terrace in front of the church may be obtained on a clear day one of the grandest views in Europe, embracing the vast green plain of Piedmont, with the Po glittering through it, and bounded on the horizon by the whole range of snowy Alps, from Monte Viso to Monte Rosa, rising straight up like an enormous wall, each peak clear cut like a cameo against the blue sky.

BEFORE a noble votive church I stood,
Raised o'er the dead of Savoy's royal blood,
Crowning the summit of a lonely height;
And what a wondrous view burst on my sight!
It seemed as if heaven's door were opened wide,
The very portals of the grave beside,
On the horizon, from the boundless plain,
From end to end rose the whole Alpine chain—
Each peak stood out against the cloudless blue;
The more I gazed, the more sublime they grew.

Life rolled its green waves to their feet, and broke
In spray of pines upon each highest rock ;
While far above, the calm white snow-fields shone,
Without a shadow in the noonday sun ;
From every stain of life's contention free,
The radiant floor of heaven they seemed to be ;
By hands angelic swept and garnished, meet
For the free tread of pure immortal feet.
So overpowering was the sight, I knelt
Awestruck upon the grassy sod, and felt
As if I breathed the intoxicating air
Of other worlds, raised far above the care
And turmoil of the common earth ; each sense
In ecstasy stretched to its utmost tense.
How dark, by contrast, seemed the vaults beneath
Where, in the dreadful loneliness of death,
Cut off from all that made their world, discrowned,
Slept the great rulers of the realms around ;
In all the splendour owning now no share,
Their dust to dust returning unaware !
But not in vain does the spectator face
This great apocalypse in such a place.
His mind may reason with assurance just,
Had man been meant to perish in the dust,
His God a vision so surpassing fair,
Would not have shown to mock his dark despair.
These scenes of earth are but the counterparts

Of nobler scenes, to which they lift our hearts ;
These hoary Alps, whose pomp the horizon fills,
Are but the shadows of eternal hills.

The glow of superadded beauty seen
In every spot, by mortal vision keen,
Is kindled there, the shadowy path to light,
That leads us to the Presence Infinite ;
And be to us, lest we should go astray,
The symbol of His glory by the way.
From the cold ashes wasting in the tomb,
A deathless loveliness shall one day bloom ;
And eyes long sealed in dust, with rapt surprise,
Shall wake amid a grander paradise.

Southern Violets

FROM far-off Nice a box of flowers has come ;
Thrice welcome 'mid the floral dearth at home.
With quick, impatient hands I lift the lid,
To see what mystery within is hid ;
Sweet violets smile up in my face in death,
And meekly yield their souls in fragrant breath,
Haunting the room with sense of other years,
Ere life was saddened with these anxious fears.
Like deep child-eyes which noonday sleep o'erpowers,
And see in dreams a fairer world than ours,
So in these violets' eyes, by death's sleep sealed,
I seem to see a summer land revealed ;
Blue cloudless skies for ever shining on,—
And bluer waters laughing to the sun ;
Dark smoke of olive-woods on heights serene,
Which some chance breeze fans into silver sheen ;
And orange groves, whose laden branches bear
Both fruit and bloom that sweeten all the air ;
And high up, on the Alpine peaks sublime,
An alien vision of a snowy clime,—
In sight of which the palm uplifts its head,
In its own radiant zone, without a dread.

'Tis winter here ; but there the roses blow ;
The sun-bleached rocks with crimson cistus glow ;
The almond trees upon their barren rods
Display a miracle of rosy buds ;
And flames of scarlet windflowers kindle fast,
In the dim shade by whispering pine-trees cast ;
And like an evening sky, the myrtle bowers
Are purple with the mist of violet flowers.
O ! would that our dear invalid were there,
Beyond these storms, to breathe the magic air,
And with each breath draw in a healing balm,
The wasting fever of her life to calm !
'Tis sad to see her thin cheek's hectic red,
O'er which angelic wings their twilight shed ;
Her lustrous eyes that larger grow each day,
And wear a look so wistful, far away,
As if, upon life's narrow summit raised,
On higher things than we can see she gazed.
That wondrous heaven below might break the bond
That draws her swiftly to the heaven beyond ;
Might bring into her eyes a homelier smile,
And we might keep her with us still awhile !

The Wild Geranium

AMONG the fragrant pine-trees of the South,
That crown Mount Boron's rugged ridge at Nice,
I found one day a hollow, edged with rocks,
And filled with shadows cool, that kept the sun
At bay, and quenched the fiery darts he flung.
Without, in the fierce-heat, strange broad-leaved
plants,
From parched air and soil, drew lusty growth.
Tree-spurges filled their veins with milky sap,
Bushes of cistus, with their rose-like blooms,
Unfolded from grey buds their petals thin
That wavered in the air, and scarce shook out
Their filmy folds, before they dropped away.
And over all, three graceful palm-trees reared
Their moveless crown into the violet sky,
And brought into the scene a desert-dream.
Each thing that caught my eye was new or strange,
And held no memory from my former life.
I felt alone; a stranger in the place.
But when I passed into the dim green nook,
Where shade and moisture made a northern clime,
I found the things that formed my childhood's world :

Fresh ivy laid its cool leaves on the rocks ;
Shy woodland ferns peeped from the crevices ;
Soft mosses glistened in the tempered light ;
And daisies kept upon their closed eyes
The pearly tears shed when they fell asleep,
Dreaming of distant fields and dewy lawns.
All these dear homely things, by instinct blind,
Found out each other in this alien spot,
And crept together in fond patriotism.
And when my foot fell on a straggling tuft
Of wild geranium, with its small pink flowers—
Hiding its poverty, in this retreat,
From its proud sisters in their splendid haunts—
A keen, familiar scent rose from its leaves ;
And in a moment, by a subtle spell,
My thoughts were wafted to my far-off home !
My happy schoolboy days came back ; I saw
In vision clear a silent wood, through which
My path led to the little schoolhouse lone,
Shaded by larches, on whose drooping boughs
The Spring hung rich green wreaths and crimson
cones ;
And bordered with rank wild geranium-tufts,
That left their musky perfume on my clothes.
Dear eyes long hid in dust looked into mine
With tenderness, and through the vanished years
Fond voices called me by my old child-name :

And golden summer days, whose cup ran o'er
With the first gladness of the youthful heart,
Their sweetness poured once more into my soul.
I blessed the happy chance that conjured up
This lovely vision in a foreign land ;
And blessed the weed that, from its bruised leaves,
Hard trodden underneath my careless foot,
That reck'd not of its lowly presence there,
An incense shed, that made its humble shrine
A moment seem the very gate of heaven !

A Waterfall

BESIDE a lofty waterfall I've stood,

Formed by a torrent from a snow-clad height,
And gazed far up to where the foaming flood
Burst from the sky-line on my awe-struck sight.

So vast its volume, and so fierce its shock,

No power at first its headlong course might stay ;
It seemed as if the everlasting rock
Before its furious onset would give way.

But as it fell, it lingered in mid-air,

And melted into lace-like wreaths of mist,
Decked by the sun with rainbow colours fair,
And swayed by passing breezes as they'd list.

And when at last it reached the dimpled pool,

Hid in its granite basin far below,
Its spray fell softly as the showers that cool
The sultry languor of the summer glow.

The aspen leaf scarce quivered to its sound,

The blue-bell smiled beneath its benison ;
And all the verdure of the forest round
A fresher greenness from its baptism won.

So have I watched for coming sorrows dread,
With heavy heart for many a weary day,
Foreboding that the torrent overhead
Would bear me with o'erflowing flood away.

But when the threatened evil came, I found
That God was better than my foolish fears ;
The furious flood fell gently to the ground,
And blessed my soul with dew of grateful tears.

Spring

THE fretful April tears are shed ; the dead things of
the past,
Stirred by the cruel winds of March, are laid to rest
at last.
Old memories nourish new-born hopes, as Autumn's
withered leaves
Supply the warp on which the Spring its rich em-
broidery weaves,
And Nature's grand kaleidoscope discloses to the
view
The broken toys of former joys restored with beauty
new.
Once more has come the balmy May, and by her
magic spell
The shadows dark are charmed away that o'er my
spirit fell.
I hear her low voice, as she lulls the lilies on her
breast,
Or combs the pine-trees' flowing hair upon the moun-
tain's crest.
I know her haunts in wood and wold ; for where
her footsteps pass,

Springs up in Eden loveliness the radiance of the grass.
Each tree she kindles by her torch bursts into leafy
flames,
And, like the sacred desert-bush, God's presence
there proclaims.
The leaves their foliage interlace along the lane's
arcade,
And make a mystery of the place, with mingled light
and shade.
The chestnuts spread their leafy palms in blessing
on the air,
And from their minarets of bloom call all the trees
to share.
With bridal blossoms pure and sweet, the blushing
orchards glow ;
And on the hawthorn hedges lie soft wreaths of
scented snow.
And where the amber clouds dissolve in rainbows
brief and bright,
A world of fair and fragile flowers is born to life and
light.
Unnurtured by the care of man, they spring forth
from the sod,
The free, glad offerings of the earth—the precious
gifts of God.
The grey-haired daisies, ever young, transfigure every
field,

And to the old world-weary heart the joy of childhood yield.
The primroses, with lavish wealth, their golden largess spread,
And on the dusty wayside banks a mimic sunshine shed.
The fairy wind-flowers cluster thick beneath the sheltering trees,
And shine, amid the twilight shades, the forest Pleiades.
The wall-flowers on the ruined fane their fiery censers swing,
And where rich incense once arose, a richer incense fling.
Hid in their cloistered leaves, the nun-like lilies of the vale,
In fragrant ministries of love, their meek white lives exhale.
And dearer, stronger far than all the care-worn heart to move,
The violets gleam among the moss, like eyes of those we love,
And speak to every lingering breeze, in voice of perfume low,
Of things that touch the soul to tears from days of long ago.
Filled from the full cup of the hills, the free rejoicing streams

Are flashing down the long green vales, in showers
of sunny gleams ;
And every little passing wave seems like a laughing
tongue,
Revealing all the secret lore of Nature in its song.
From morn to night the air is bright with sheen of
glancing wings,
And thrilled, like voices in a dream, with insect
murmurings.
The lark, a wingéd rapture, soars and sings at
heaven's own gate ;
The blackbird tunes his merry flute to cheer his
patient mate.
And in the firwood's mystic shrine all day in ecstasy,
The thrush in tuneful chorus chants its "Benedicite."
While from the uplands far and faint, with spell all
bosoms own,
Unchanged through changing ages comes the cuckoo's
monotone.
God reigneth and the Earth is glad ! her large, self-
conscious heart,
A glowing tide of life and joy pours through each
quickened part.
The very stones Hossanahs cry ; the forests clap
their hands ;
And in the benison of heaven each lifted face
expands ;

And day, too short for all its bliss, lingers with half-closed eyes,
When every sunset cloud has paled, and moon and stars arise.
Awake and sing, ye in the dust that dwell ; for as the dew
Of herbs, a blessed dew from heaven our spirits shall renew ;
And with a quickened pulse, we'll gaze upon the bright love-looks
That woo us all day long, from trees and flowers and murmuring brooks ;
And see a beauteous heavenly thought in everything around ;
And lessons learn of faith and hope from every sight and sound.

A Nest in a Heather Bush

ONE day in June I found a dainty nest,
So cunningly hid in a heather bush
That fringed a wayside rock, no human eye
Would e'er have seen the secret hidden there,
Had not the bird betrayed it, flying out.
'Twixt nest and bush a subtle harmony
Revealed itself, suggesting precious thoughts.
The nest grew to its round completeness, formed
By skill unconscious, as the heather sprays
Grew naturally around its mossy sides,
Keeping the bright eye of the laughing day
From peering in with glance too curious.
And when the crimson bloom burst through the leaves
Seven tiny eggs, blue as a summer wave,
Blushed 'neath the warm reflection which it cast.
Love built the nest—love shaped the heather bloom ;
And both are tender products of the same
Mysterious heart that throbs in Nature's breast.
The nest is but a flower-cup, in whose depth
The bird-life blossoms ; and the heather flower
Is but a brighter-hued and tenderer nest,
In which the plant expands its richest grace.

The mate's sweet song upon the neighbouring tree,
The brightened feathers on its bosom soft,
The deftly-woven nest and gem-like eggs,
The mother's love that quickens them to life,
Are but the counterparts in higher form
Of hue, and shape, and fragrance of the flower ;
Both making up the marriage feast of Spring.
The heather-bells make silent music which
The inner ear of soul alone can hear ;
The birds' sweet song expresses all the joy
Of young life budding from the old and sere—
The perfect harmony of means and ends
In God's great world of kindred natures made.
Above the mystery of a higher life
Hid in its heart—the seed of future wings
And future song—the wayside heather bush,
Burning with its own crimson fire of bloom,
Reveals the presence of the great “I Am,”
Who clothes the lilies—feeds the fowls of Heaven,
Associates Himself with all His works,
Dwells in the bush and in the human heart,
And gives expression full in various modes
To the same primal element of love ;
So that the passer-by, who looks within,
And understands the meaning of the sight,
Puts off his shoes in reverence, and feels
The place whereon he stands is holy ground.

The Corn¹

THEY tell us that the homely corn that grows,
From russet stem and leaf, our daily bread,
Was once a lily ; which by various steps
Of menial work, became degraded thus.
It left its high-born sisters in their robes
Of gorgeous idleness to clothe itself
In this plain dress for common household use.
Its bright-hued petals, nectar-cup, and store
Of fragrance sweet, that insect lovers wooed,
It sacrificed ; and only wandering winds,
That have no sense of beauty or delight
Now woo its sober blooms with heedless sighs.
But for this noble humbling of itself,
God has more highly honoured it, to be
The chief support of human beings, made
In His own image—rulers of the world.

¹ The corn along with all the grasses belongs to the second great division of plants—the liliaceous order ; and according to evolutionists is either a lily in its lowest stage of development, or a degraded form of the higher type ; the latter supposition being more probably its true history. Whatever foundation in reality it may have, the idea is a most beautiful and suggestive one.

And now, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh,
Its being mingles with our nature high ;
And through that union, it ascends our throne,
And gains in us the wondrous power, by which
The lilies wake to consciousness, and know
That they are beautiful, and find a speech,
In which their worship may go up to heaven,
And their wise lessons reach immortal souls,
To train them for their glorious destiny.
And greater honour still has God bestowed,
Choosing it, at the Holy Feast, for type
Of His own Son, who laid aside His robes
Of glory, worn in the far heavenly home,
And girded with the linen towel His loins,
That He might be our servant, wash our feet,
And feed our souls with food convenient ;
Nay, more ! become through the last sacrifice,
Stripped not of costly robes, but costlier life—
Himself the living bread that nourishes
Unto eternal life a dying world.

A Corn-field in Glencroë

DEEP in the emerald cup of circling hills,
A corn-field lies along the rugged bank
Of a wild river, that has cut its way
Through rocky orbit, filled with pastures old
Lit up with yellow stars of tormentil,
Where once had laughed the blue eye of a lake.
Redeemed from Nature's wildness by man's toil,
The little lonely croft smiles in the waste,
And speaks of all the tender things of home.
The poppy kindles not its cross of fire,
Nor lifts the cornflower its blue banner there,
Nature's stern struggle with itself to wage.
The mountains dower with their own floral gifts
The foster-child they have so gently reared ;
And twine among its yellow hair their wreaths
Of purple scabious, snowy euphrasy,
And silken Alpine lady's mantle rare.
Day after day I've watched the lean ears fill
With secret sweetness from the earth and sky,
And o'er its stem and glume the russet hue
Of ripeness creeping from the sunsets low,
Until the field, whose greenness blended once

With the green hills, now stands a thing apart,
A patch of mimic sunshine prisoned there
A golden aureole round Nature's brow.
What sacred memories gather round the plot,
That take us back to old idyllic days,
When all men laboured in the harvest field,
And deemed its joy the typal joy of life!
The first ripe crop that grew above the grave
Of the old world, arched by the covenant bow,
The pledge and surety of all harvests since;
The plenteous years that fed the famished ones
Upon the Nile's green banks; the touching tale
Of the fair gleaner in her kinsman's fields,
Who found love's solace for the stranger's heart;
The Sabbath walk among the rustling corn,
With Him who claimed to be the Sabbath's Lord,
When His disciples plucked the dusky ears,
And broke their fast with meat from God's own hand,
And felt it was a sacrament indeed;
And more than all the wondrous miracle,
Wrought far from cultivated haunts of men,
When the slow season's work was done at once,
And bread that never knew the curse of toil
Grew swiftly as it passed from hand to hand
Along the hungry ranks. These memories
The ages and the generations link,
And make one family of all mankind

Living in one great home, and fed each day
From one kind Father's store. This corn-field seems
A silent gospel. Here I see once more
The Master's steps beside the conscious corn,
Making a Sabbath of the common day ;
I see the hand that works behind the veil,
Stretched forth anew to multiply the loaves,
And crown with heavenly glory common things.
Above, Ben Arthur in the opal air
Lifts its huge altar to heaven's outer door ;
Beside me chants its ceaseless hymn of praise
The pure-lipped river ; while the laden ears
Store up the manna, like the pot of old
Within the Hebrew Ark. The sordid world,
With all its money-changers, care-worn toils,
Is shut out from this shrine not made with hands.
From sowing time, when man had done his part,
To reaping time when man must work again,
The field has been in the sole charge of God ;
The farmer slept and woke, and all the time
The earth brought forth its fruit unaided—how
Man knoweth not. Beneath the patient heavens,
In presence of all enemies subdued,
The storm and drought, the blight of storm and rust,
God spread a table in this wilderness—
His annual corn beside the unfailing stream,
The bread and water that are sure to all.

With thankful hearts shall we not worship here,
And feel that man lives not by bread alone,
But by each word that cometh from God's mouth,
Expressed in Nature's mute symbolic speech,
In lofty mountain and in lonely glebe.

The Last Daisy

OUR dear wee Callum, on the river's brink,
A solitary ox-eye daisy found,
That lingered in the late September light,
The last of its fair sisterhood ; with all
The sadness in its eye of joys o'erpassed ;
Its golden disk and silver halo dimmed
By Autumn's breath. Scarce taller than its stem,
With large round eyes of wonder innocent,
And almost on a level with the flower,
The child gazed fondly on the lone earth-star,
Raying its beauty round it in the grass,
And saw strange mystic beauty in its face,
Unknown to older eyes which sin has filmed.
Do not the angels of these little ones
Behold always the Father's smiling face
Bent o'er each thing of beauty He has made ?
With childlike glee, subdued by soft regret,
He plucked the precious prize, and quaintly said,
“ ‘Tis the last gowan of the happy year ! ”
Fair flower ! fair child ! so lovely in their life,
And not divided in their lovely death !
In one short week the little feet were still,

The soul-full eyes closed to all earthly sights,
He vanished with the daisies loved so well,
And with him all the summer of our heart.
We will not murmur ; for, a tenderer hand
Than ours has plucked our human daisy here,
To plant it in His fadeless fields above,
Beside the stream of life. Not his the fate
Of the late autumn flower to linger on,
With all his loved ones gone, and pine away
In the cold feeble light of lonely age.
Kind death has saved him all the waste of life,
Conserved his beauty at the fairest point,
And kept for us our boy in heaven unchanged
Through all our changes—an immortal child
To love for evermore.

A Grave Beside a Stream

How strange the union of the stream and grave!

Eternal motion and eternal rest;
Earth's billow fixed, beside the transient wave
Upon the water's breast.

The summer cloud upon the height distils
Each sunny ripple hurrying swiftly past;
And man's proud life, like fleeting vapour, fills
This wave of earth at last.

The streamlet, through the churchyard's solemn calm,
Sounds like an ancient prophet's voice of faith,
Chanting beside the grave a glorious psalm
Of life in midst of death.

The living water and the burial mound
Proclaim in parable, that through death's sleep
Flows on for aye, tho' none may hear its sound,
Life's river, still and deep.

The grave like Laban's "heap of witness" seems,
Raised 'twixt the sleeper and the world's alarm,
O'er which no anxious cares or evil dreams
May pass to do him harm.

No more he wrestles by the brook of life ;
The night is past,—the angel stands revealed ;
He now enjoys the blessing wrung from strife,
And every wound is healed.

To my Grandchild

JEAN MACMILLAN WORTHINGTON,

Born on my own birthday, 17th September.

My life is waning to its close,
And over all its scenes are laid
Those level rays whose richer hues
Show that they speedily must fade.

But in my daughter's new world home
A dewdrop fair of tender light,
A morning-star of hope has come
To make my evening shadows bright.

Our birthdays are the same ; but mine
Contracts the too swift sunset hours,
While hers unfolds, like beams that shine
At sunrise on the opening flowers.

Sweet bud beside my fading leaf!
Bright crocus in my harvest field!
May flower of spring and autumn sheaf
Blend in thy life their joy to yield.

The Bridge

As sunlit stream upon its bosom takes
Th' inverted shadow of a bridge on high ;
And thus the arch in air and water makes
One perfect circle to the gazer's eye :

So 'tis with life ; the things that do appear
Are fleeting shadows on time's passing tide,
Cast by the sunshine of a higher sphere,
From viewless things that changelessly abide.

The real is but the half of life ; it needs
The ideal to make a perfect whole ;
The sphere of sense is incomplete, and pleads
For closer union with the sphere of soul.

All things of use are bridges that conduct
To things of faith, which give them truest worth ;
And Christ's own parables do us instruct
That heaven is but the counterpart of earth.

The Storax Vial

In the beautiful gardens of La Mortola on the Riviera, there are growing many specimens of the storax tree, which yields a most precious and deliciously fragrant gum, supposed to have formed one of the ingredients of the holy incense of the Jewish Tabernacle. Sir Thomas Hanbury's brother, the famous Pharmacologist, searched in vain for this gum for many years all over Southern France, Asia Minor, and Palestine. Everywhere he found the tree crippled for fuel, and unable to produce its resin. His delight therefore was very great when one day he found a copious supply on a young tree in front of his brother's house at La Mortola. In less than four months afterwards he died. Sir Thomas Hanbury still treasures the storax tears in the small vial in which he placed them, and they seem to lose none of their fragrance with the passing years. As duly as May comes round each year the storax trees in the garden are covered with fragrant white blossoms ; but the remarkable thing is that he has never found on any of them since his brother's death a single tear !

IN ancient days, among the Roman race,
It was a touching ritual to place,
Beside the ashes of the cherished dead,
A bottle full of tears above them shed,
And seal them both together in the tomb.
But this small vial in a brother's room,
Kept ever sacred, seems more touching still,

Which Nature with her fragrant tears did fill,
For one who knew her healing herbs and trees,
The balms and anodynes man's ills that ease ;
And yet himself died ere life's sad decline,
Of wounds for which there is no medicine.
Long had he sought in vain for one sweet tear,
From trees pruned down for fuel every year,
That for such cruel treatment kept their woe
Concealed at heart and made no outward show.
Great, therefore, was his joy one day to find
A single tree that from its wounded rind,
A vegetable Niobe, poured fast
Its perfumed tears! It seemed as if at last
Nature her alabaster-box brought there,
And broke it that she spices might prepare
In consecration of his burial ;
For in four months he passed away, with all
His wealth of learning, and his modest grace,
That blessed the world. It was a fitting place
To which to bring such spices for the dead ;
An ancient Roman cemetery, o'erspread
With garden-bloom : as fair a paradise
As ever glowed beneath a poet's eyes,
Well named " La Mortola," among whose bowers,
For ages human dust has turned to flowers,
And thoughts of old-world sorrow, long forgot,
But give a deeper interest to the spot.

For what are graves but gardens that are sown,
And gardens graves that into bloom have grown,
And all graves yet are destined to become
Gardens more beautiful than man's first home.
This little vial smells as sweet to-day
As when first filled before he passed away ;
An emblem of the faithful hearts that keep
His love embalmed within their chambers deep.
Pure as the snowy blossoms of the tree
That shed those tears, his life was known to be.
And like those plants from whose cleft heart-wood
 come
The fragrant balsam and the precious gum ;
So, through the sufferings of his dying bed—
Through bright hopes crushed and heart flowers
 withered—
His soul's rare excellence was fully shown,
And charms revealed that were before unknown.
Well has he earned the toiler's last repose,
Where perfectly are cured all human woes.
The Rose of Sharon to his grave has lent,
By in it lying, its own lasting scent.
And death, all memories of him hath made
As sweet as leaves of woodruff when they fade.

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